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THE CHURCH AND CHILD PROTECTION

ALLAN HOBEN

Associate Professor of Practical Theology, University of Chicago; Field Secretary
Chicago Juvenile Protective Association; Author of
"The Minister and the Boy"

The opening of the Juvenile Court in Chicago, July 1, 1899, marked an epoch in the treatment of delinquent, dependent, and neglected children. However, the Illinois Juvenile Court law, which went into effect at that time, failed to provide for the salaries of probation officers and for the expenses of a separate detention home where the boys under seventeen and the girls under eighteen who came within the jurisdiction of the court might be kept awaiting hearing.

As is so often the case, a volunteer organization had to step into the breach in order to make effective the progress which had been registered in legislation. This organization was known as the Juvenile Court Committee and during the following eight years it expended a hundred thousand dollars of private funds in providing suitable probation service and detention quarters for the unfortunate children brought to court. At the end of that period both of these vital functions of the Juvenile Court—separate detention before hearing and probation afterward when ordered—had been entirely taken over by the city and county acting jointly, and the system seemed fairly on the road to permanent success.

But an improvement, however marked, in handling the precious waste product of the city could hardly satisfy those who beheld this annual procession of some five thousand children expiating

in their own bodies and souls the ignorance, carelessness, greed, and lust of Chicago. Having accomplished something by way of improved treatment, it became clearly necessary to undertake much more by way of prevention. Accordingly the organization, changing its name to that of the Juvenile Protective Association, addressed itself primarily to the task of eliminating the causes of juvenile delinquency.

In order to carry out this plan the city was districted and protective officers were assigned to the various districts. Furthermore, in most of the districts local organizations, known as juvenile protective leagues, affiliated with the central body, were brought into existence. The central association now has thirty-two employees and an annual expense budget of \$32,436.84 contributed by about four hundred and fifty individuals, firms, and clubs. It handled 4,618 cases during the past year, the officers making 28,321 visits in the interests of child protection. The local leagues have 1,528 members and a budget of \$6,155.55 for constructive work. The court cases are handled entirely by the central organization with its expert staff, and have to do chiefly with the prosecution of adults for contributing to the delinquency of children.

For the purpose of suppressing evil conditions which contribute to juvenile

delinquency, numerous investigations have been made. All the nickel shows of the city have been carefully studied and a police censorship bureau established, which, in the course of the past two years, has inspected 7,695,000 feet of films and has prevented 117 miles of objectionable pictures from coming before the eyes of Chicago's children. Or, to come nearer the whole truth, the bureau has kept from circulation, not this amount of evil suggestion, but this amount multiplied by the number of films—probably from 15 to 20—identical with the sample inspected and awaiting release and circulation if approved. Penny gambling machines in great numbers have been removed from the small stores adjacent to the public schools. Saloonkeepers have been prosecuted in 732 cases for selling liquor to minors, while there have been 209 prosecutions of those who were selling tobacco to minors. A study is now being made of the 1,535 poolrooms of the city which are very loosely conducted, encourage petty gambling, and constitute a menace to boys under eighteen years of age, who are constantly admitted contrary to law.

Two and a half million obscene postal cards have been destroyed and 178 persons prosecuted for selling them. Immorality on the excursion boats has been suppressed, the public amusement parks have been given vigilant supervision and many of their evils removed, an ordinance regulating street trading by children has been secured, public schools have been opened as recreation centers, the Court of Domestic Relations has been established, bathing beaches have been opened, new social centers

organized, outings conducted, and many other similar achievements made.

Of course, in such an effort Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Jews work shoulder to shoulder. Their common cause is the welfare of Chicago's 882,000 children. But, strange to say, the response of the churches as such has always been disappointing. Five hundred letters embodying the above facts and asking for the appointment of delegates to meet with the association to plan for safeguarding the moral welfare of the children brought only twenty-six replies from the pastors, although stamped and addressed cards were prepared and inclosed for use.

Now it must be apparent to any city minister who has studied his field that, if he will save the children, something more is needed than the immediate service which the church can render under its own roof. Of these 882,000 over 600,000 are foreign born or the children of foreign-born parents. The Sunday school cannot reach many of them, but the city herself, in all the evil which she permits and the injustice which she condones, does reach them, and that all the time. And the religious organizations are in duty bound to make the impress of the city upon this new life an impress for righteousness and spiritual opportunity rather than an impetus to evil and a cruel bondage to sin.

If all ministers would take the pains of becoming informed as to what the real battle is, as to what the specialized agencies of redemption outside the church are, there would be few indeed who would fail to see that co-operation in effort of this sort is as vital and necessary as are those activities which are

carried on within the church herself. In fact, nothing will more please and favor the forces of evil which prey upon every normal and every perverted desire of youth, than for the religious people to keep themselves strictly confined to hymns, prayers, sermons, and testimonies. If, in this sense, we will "mind our own business" they will take care of all else.

In fact, unless the religious impulse can burst its sanctified casings and remake the neighborhood or living conditions, its teachings remain relatively null and void. It is true of Juvenile Court children as well as of those who are detained in the lock-ups and the county jail that practically all profess adherence to some religious faith. The county jail figures for 1911 show that out of 7,335 prisoners only 70 profess no religion, while out of 1,208 boys between the ages of 17 and 21 only 6 think of themselves as without religious connection. Although it must be granted that such figures cannot be taken at face value, nevertheless in the minds of these unfortunates there was some attachment, some sense of belonging, possibly some hope of shelter and help which they did not receive.

An intensive study of one hundred cases of boys held in the jail revealed the fact that in no case was the help of the clergy or church extended to these boys in the critical hour of their trouble; and the testimony of the probation officers of the Juvenile Court shows also that the church is not active in behalf of those stricken families whose children, through some misdemeanor, become public wards; which means that at the very time of keen sorrow and bitter humiliation the agency most noted for

comfort, wise counsel, and divine love is not in touch with the very homes where its ministry is most acutely needed.

The fault lies partly with probation officers and police officials who do not refer these matters to the ministers promptly and insistently as their pressing and legitimate concern, and partly with the ministers as a whole who know little of such matters and who usually give courts, jails, and arrested persons a wide berth.

When the fire alarm sounds, the company rushes down the street, every man in his place, all the paraphernalia of fire fighting unlimbered, and the engine under steam. It is a thrilling sight, and very often the cause is but a small blaze or false alarm. But here we have in one city 86,000 young people taking their chances every night in the public dance halls—most of the girls fourteen to sixteen years of age, most of the boys sixteen to eighteen, most of the halls run for and by the liquor interests, and many of them infested with procurers. The evil can be remedied only by the concerted action of right-minded people in securing an amusement or morals commission and by providing wholesome social recreation for those whose home and labor conditions deprive them of all proper facilities for the primary satisfactions of recreation and joy.

Jesus explicitly set the child in our midst as the norm of discipleship and the unrivaled claimant for the attention and care of his followers. With the passing of the simple conditions in which he lived and the advent of more complex and strenuous times, the obligation resting upon the church is increased

rather than diminished. The ascendancy of economic and industrial interests has imperiled those untold values which, with every generation, we have fresh from the hand of God.

Whatever agencies are at work to make the crooked places straight and the rough places plain, they indeed are co-laborers together with him. The fact that in this one city alone there are 188,000 babies under four years of age asking by their very innocence and helplessness for a fair chance at life, and the fact that the chance we give them is the true measure of our civilization and also our self-imposed verdict must move us to action. The fact that in a city laying claim to Christian civilization 1,000 children of unmarried mothers utterly disappear from view in the course of a year, leaving no trace of their existence or of their decease, ought to mean something to the United Church of Chicago.

The fact that when one of these lambs is caught in the cruel impenetrable thicket of city life and is brought trembling as a culprit before the court there is no delegated representative of the Protestant church to give counsel and help, while both of the older churches—Catholic and Jewish—have a shepherd and friend ever at hand, ought to bring shame to our disjointed Protestantism.

Furthermore, although public provision is made for protecting the interests of girl offenders under eighteen

and of boy offenders under seventeen, the whole process of law, as at present administered, is a conspiracy for the conviction of arrested persons over that age if they are poor and friendless. The policeman must "make good" and have the prisoner held to the grand jury; the word of the prisoner is not taken as against that of the officer; the officer uses force and intimidation to secure confessions. If, after preliminary examination, no bail is immediately forthcoming, the prisoner is "mugged" and his photograph put in the rogues' gallery. The grand jury hears only the evidence for prosecution and meanwhile the prisoner may have lain in jail for weeks. Finally, of 81,649 persons arrested and detained in Chicago lock-ups during 1911, 49,034 were discharged by the municipal judges when their cases ultimately came up for trial—but all these had endured the disgrace of "being run in"; had spent some time in the foul lock-ups; and in most cases, although decreed innocent, came away leaving their photographs in the possession of the identification bureau.

It must be that when the church people see the injustice of "justice" they will provide a public defender to stand beside the friendless and unfortunate who fall into the hands of the law and to meet, humanize, and render just the present roughshod methods of prosecution.¹ "I was in prison and ye came unto me."

Religious leaders who desire to secure further information relative to the Juvenile Protective Association may order the following reports of investigations from the central office at 816 South Halsted Street, Chicago (those marked with an asterisk are free; all others are 5 cents each): *Synopsis of J.P.A. Work for 1912*; *Annual Report, 1912**; *The Dance Hall*; *The Five-Cent Theater*; *Girls Employed in Hotels and Restaurants*; *Some Legislative Needs in Illinois*; *On the Trail of the Juvenile-Adult Offender*; *The Care of Illegitimate Children in Chicago*.

The situation in Chicago is but typical of that which prevails in all our large cities; while the conditions in smaller places are often more unjust because no organized effort is made to prevent delinquency or to befriend the delinquent. Consequently a great duty, which is at the same time a great opportunity, confronts the minister. He must make such a survey as will bring clearly before him the number, location, character, and strength of the destructive agencies of his parish. For it is with these that he must contend for the integrity and rights of the children.

In addition to the social survey, whether jointly or independently made, he should become acquainted with those who deal officially with children in school, street, factory, and court, and he should get into close touch with the welfare agencies which have been specialized to make effective the religious impulse which is ever quickened and stimulated in the church. Delegates to these various bodies should be appointed and should bring back to the church an account of what is being done and of what, in the opinion of the experts, needs to be done.

Representatives of welfare organizations should have opportunity to present their cause before some regular gathering of the church. Union meetings of all the churches of a given district should be arranged for the discussion of those pressing problems which affect child morality and which demand common or civic treatment. The regular budget for benevolence should include an appropriation for the support of the standard and accredited societies laboring for juvenile protection. Volunteers should be forthcoming for friendly visiting and for inspection of neighborhood conditions.

A committee, representing the federated Protestant churches, should be empowered to employ a minister of the right sort to be in constant attendance at the sessions of the Juvenile Court. Above all, it should be made very clear that unless the church, operating in the wide field of civics, legislation, and philanthropy, can succeed in christianizing the city, the city will certainly smother the church; and, what is more important, will blight and ruin an incalculable number of young lives.